

## Couéism in Theory and Practise

E. BOYD BARRETT, S.J.

*Reprinted from the "Month"*

THE theory of Emile Coué has provoked of late much thought and discussion. Following swiftly on the psychoanalytic rage, and robbing it of its glamor, auto-suggestion has still more profoundly stirred the popular imagination. Its simplicity and unlimited adaptability, combined with its inexpensiveness, has contributed to its popularity. The well-known formula, "*Day by day, in every way, I grow better and better,*" which is its kernel, has become for some an inspiration, while for others, scoffers by nature, a source of endless fun. Meanwhile, Emile Coué has been hailed by many as a prophet and a wonder-worker. Men say that he has opened the gates of a terrestrial paradise wherefrom pain, sickness, worry, and "life's created burdens," "the former things" of the old world are banished. His teachings are outspreading into the domains of education and social science. His influence radiates far afield from Nancy, and by some it is asserted that his name will live for ever, and that his place among the gods is secure.

The claims made by enthusiasts on behalf of the Coué method are stupendous. It is said that ninety-seven per cent of the 40,000 patients that pass through his hands yearly at Nancy are cured or greatly benefited. No type of disease withstands his healing system. Organic trouble and functional trouble alike are said to yield to suggestion. The paralyzed use again their dead limbs, consumptives regain their strength, ulcers are healed, partial blindness, deafness and dumbness, together with all kinds of nervous disorders, mental or physical, are cured. And yet, the wonder-worker himself disclaims any credit. "I have never cured anyone," he says. "My patients cure themselves. I show them how to do so, *voilà tout.*" "Denial of the dignity of disease is one of the characteristics of Coué's clinic," writes Charles Baudouin. "No homage is paid to it as a dread monarch. It is gently ridiculed. Its terrors are made to appear second-rate and its victims end by

laughing at it." In fine, even unsympathetic scientists are forced by facts to admit that there is "something in it," although, needless to say, they discount to a very great extent the extravagant claims put forward by Emile Coué's followers.

Though the method of Emile Coué is already well known, it may be well to describe it briefly. It is simple in the extreme. The patient, no matter what his complaint may be, is taught to *suggest* to himself that he is improving and getting cured. This suggestion takes the form already quoted—"Day by day, in every way, I grow better and better." The formula may, of course, be amplified and adapted to special circumstances, or particularized so as to apply directly to certain ailments or disabilities, whether physical or mental. The formula is to be repeated many times over, when the mind is blank, or rather when attention is not held or occupied. Drowsy moments before or after sleep; occasions when one is quite relaxed, and when the senses are lulled, and the mind at ease, are best. At such moments entrance into the "unconscious" is supposed to be easiest and the aim of the method is to win admittance for the suggestion into the "unconscious." The idea contained in the formula, of growing improvement, will, when assimilated by the unconscious mind, gradually work out the cure through organic agencies. Such is in brief the theory and practise of Coué, which has held sway in the "New Nancy School" since 1910.

The central point to discuss, amid all the hurly-burly of fancy, theory, and superficial psychology which circles around the term auto-suggestion, now heavily laden with various meanings, is the time-honored problem of the influence of mind on matter. How far can the mind control the physical functions of the body? In what manner does it exercise its control? Modern psychology has gathered a rich harvest of illustrations of mind influence from the fields of hypnotism, neurasthenia and social phenomena. There is nothing whatever new in the doctrine that men are very suggestible. We imitate consciously and unconsciously in a thousand ways. Environment, and all that makes up environment, whether physical or psychical, influences us enormously both physically and mentally. It is nothing new to say that we *suggest* our-

selves into and out of various maladies. Nor in that aspect of auto-suggestion which emphasizes the motive force of images, sentiments and ideas, is there anything new. Half a century ago the impulse power of images and thoughts had been very fully dealt with. As regards the facts and instances adduced in explanation and support of the new theory, it would be difficult to find anything not previously fully recorded and carefully analyzed. The idea even of curing by systematic suggestion is very old, and systems perhaps more worthy of adoption than that of M. Coué have been devised, although they have failed to attract public attention. Indeed, in spite of the extravagant claims made on behalf of M. Coué by some of his commentators, his chief merit, apart, of course, from his practical work, is the fact that he emphasizes once more the part that suggestion plays in life, bringing out its therapeutic bearings, and offers a simple and, for some, a helpful method of calling into play the latent recuperative resources of our nature.

#### THE MEANING OF SUGGESTION

The word *suggestion* has come to have a rather technical meaning in the New Nancy School. Binet's definition, "a moral pressure exercised by one person over another," has been rejected, and emphasis is laid on the assimilation of the idea by the unconscious mind. If I happen to mention casually to a friend that a certain book is very interesting, I am not exercising a moral pressure of any kind, and yet it may be that the idea I have, so to say, thrown into my friend's mind may be assimilated quite unconsciously, and he may procure the book and read it. This is a typical instance of suggestion in the strict sense. It is not hetero-suggestion according to the Nancy School. True, the idea comes from me, but it enters my friend's mind, makes a part of it, is assimilated by it as his own. In this assimilation which leads to action *suggestion* consists, and it is always auto-suggestion, self-suggestion. "All suggestion," says Baudouin, "is auto-suggestion." It is a putting into operation of the ideo-reflex power which exists in us all. It is intra-individual, not inter-individual. It is not subjection to or submission to the will of another. It is the assimilation and transformation of an idea into an act,

through subconscious agencies. Such is the manner in which suggestion is explained in the new school.

The psychological theory on which auto-suggestion is based is thus formulated. "The thought we think determines not only our mental states, our sentiments and emotions, but the delicate actions and adjustments of our physical bodies." This principle is much more clearly and accurately formulated by Father Eymieu in *Le Gouvernement de Soi-même*, wherein he treats very fully of idealism:

L'idée incline à l'acte dont elle est la représentation. Toute idée, dans toute conscience tend à provoquer l'acte. L'influence des idées introduites dans la conscience se prolonge jusqu'à ce qu'elles aient été effacées par une idée plus forte. L'idée se développe non seulement par une évolution intime vers l'acte correspondant, mais encore par une association avec les idées et les phénomènes connexes vers une ensemble ordonné. . . .

Father Eymieu treats of self-suggested maladies and cures, and shows how an idea (in the wide sense) or an image may be regarded as the commencement of the act. His explanation or analysis of this phenomenon is worth recording. Distinguishing between spiritual knowledge and knowledge of the senses, he points out that the former type of knowledge corresponds to the free will, while the latter type corresponds to blind and inevitable impulse. As, however, sensation or sense knowledge always accompanies spiritual knowledge, there is in every idea the element of an involuntary or necessary impulse (*appétit fatal*). It is on account of this sense-impulse that every idea tends to produce the act it represents and in the measure in which it is associated with sense knowledge it is efficacious in producing automatically the act:

L'idée sera donc efficace dans la mesure où elle se mélangera de sensations. En d'autres termes plus une idée va se sensibiliser ou—qu'on me permette ce mot—s'incarner, plus l'acte définitif sera rendu facile ou même fatal, plus l'idée sera efficace.

The idea then tends to give rise to the act. But, in moral matters, the act gives rise to the sentiment of which it is the expression. If then we are anxious to have certain

sentiments, for instance, courage and cheerfulness, we have an obvious way of awakening them within us. We must *act as if* we already had the sentiments in question, *a force de pleurer, de gémir, de crier comme si elles sentaient une grande douleur, elles finissent par la sentir*. When patients come to Coué and complain of depression, he proposes as a remedy to say to themselves, again and again, at appropriate times, "I am feeling more and more cheerful, more and more courageous," etc. Father Eymieu seems to improve on this in recommending them "*to act as if they were cheerful, courageous,*" etc. Coué depends on the awakening of the idea in the mind, and the assimilation by the unconscious of the idea. Father Eymieu, basing himself on everyday observation, recommends the thorough simulation, physically and mentally, of the required state, and he claims that when properly employed he has not known his method to fail.

#### THE POWER OF SUGGESTION

There are many obvious instances of mind-influence on the organism in which "suggestion" seems to play a part—if suggestion is the right word to apply to the *psychical* part of the phenomenon. "Suggestion is not everything," says Bernheim, "but in everything there is an element of suggestion." Let us take the time worn plank walking instance to begin with. To walk a thirty-foot plank nine inches wide, were it to lie on the ground, would be an easy matter, but were it to bridge a chasm it would be virtually impossible for the ordinary man. In the latter case, fear, an emotion, is aroused, and the idea or image of falling follows. This idea of a movement gives birth to the movement. The fear of falling has now evolved into a movement towards falling. The intense emotional accompaniment gives all the more strength to this movement, and finally the mind is wholly absorbed, fascinated by and obsessed with the idea of falling; the will is, so to speak, demobilized, and one falls. Moral falls are often analogous. *L'émotion-choc dissocie la conscience et incline même à l'acte dont on a peur, selon la grandeur de l'émotion-choc et l'émotivité du sujet*. Moral theologians have recognized the possibility of passion depriving one of the power of free choice. And it may well be that the

everyday verdict in suicide cases, "while temporary insane," is merely a way of expressing what common sense justly takes into consideration; namely, the psychology of the irresistible force of emotional ideas under circumstances such as are described above.

Fascination, obsession and "infatuation" in its psychological sense, are very common phenomena. One may easily become fascinated by a glaring light, a rattling window, a worrying thought or a recurring pain. Once attention is caught and held, to the exclusion of other things, one is fascinated. We may be anxious to read, but if a barrel-organ in the street absorbs our attention, we must throw down our book. An obsession of such a kind engenders an "impossibility." Suggestion lies at the root of the phenomenon. The thought—"I cannot read while that noise continues" becomes assimilated mentally. We make a law for ourselves by such suggestioning. *Direct* efforts of the will are useless, they only intensify the attention given to the noise and strengthen the impossibility. Against obsession, or "infatuation" of this kind, indirect means alone succeed. Fault has been found with Coué for stating that "where the imagination and the will are in conflict, the imagination invariably gains the day." And yet in the sense in which he says it (he is referring to such phenomena as fixed ideas and obsessions), his statement is an old and admitted truth. The term which he uses, "imagination," is not the most appropriate term, nor is his law formulated accurately, but truth underlies his statement. When attention and feeling are held by a pain, *direct* volition is powerless to overcome such a combination. The will may, however, succeed by the indirect means of turning the attention to something else. Spiritual writers advise such "indirect" methods in the case of attention being caught and held by seductive thoughts. It would be vain for the will to struggle directly with "imagination" aflame with passion. Soon the whole attention would be so held, absorbed and fascinated, if it was allowed freely to dwell on the seductive thought, that the idea or image-force would become irresistible. Father Eymieu well points out that the image or idea can become so richly emotional as to lead inevitably to the act. The will has the duty of controlling the attention, and of not

allowing it to become obsessed and infatuated in such matters. It is the part of the will to decline such hopeless encounters—direct efforts of the will only serve to increase the obsession—for as Coué justly says, “in the conflict between the will and the ‘imagination’ the force of the ‘imagination’ is in direct ratio to the square of the will.”

Coué wisely warns people not to strain or use *effort* in inducing suggestion. The idea to be introduced into the subconscious should be allowed to enter easily, freely, not be driven in. The mind does not assimilate ideas and form association-complexes under threat from the will. A kind of mental evolution has to take place in suggestion and this happens in accordance with the nature and laws of the mind which are not in this matter controlled by the will. Hence one can quite understand Coué’s point of view in one of his answers to patients: “Monsieur, you have been making efforts. You must put trust in the imagination, not in the will. Think you are better and you will become so.”

The unnoticed unconscious influence of an idea on the body is well shown in Cumberlandism, in the experiments with Chevreul’s pendulum and, indeed, by Coué’s hand-clasping exercise. An adaptation of the Chevreul pendulum, a key swinging on a cord from a rod, will illustrate the matter. I chalk a white circle on a table, and hold the rod with the key-pendulum hanging over the centre of the circle. Then I look round and round the circle, thinking and imagining that the key will swing round and round the circle, but at the same time I do not move my hand consciously. Soon the key will begin a slowly-increasing orbit, and finally will freely swing round the chalked circle. Here again is an instance of idea-force—the idea inclining (unconsciously) to the act—the image being the unconscious commencement of the act. Instances of a like kind abound. A snapshot taken of a jumping competition will reveal the legs of some of the onlookers in the air as though they too were jumping. A blush, a yawn, a laugh, or a sneeze, may have not uninteresting consequences through the force of imitation and suggestion.

#### RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PHYSICAL AND THE PSYCHICAL

The significance of the relations between the physical,



the physiological, and the psychical is at times lost sight of. There is nothing very noteworthy at first sight in the fact that a well-directed upper-cut will knock a man down, because the discharge of a physical force must have physical consequences. But there are also other consequences of a less markedly physical order, the nature of which it is not so easy to explain. There is the sudden innervation of several muscles. There is a dramatic change in the complicated vascular system. Physiological phenomena of a most complex nature follow at once, some secretions are inhibited, some are facilitated. Then through the shaken central nervous system several kinds of psychical phenomena are brought about. Many volumes would hardly suffice to give a full account of the effects of such a knock-down blow. But in this instance we are only considering the results of a *physical* stimulus. No less wonderful results follow from a *psychical* stimulus, let us suppose from a sudden jealous thought. The jealous thought, with its emotional accompaniment, will almost instantaneously and unconsciously bring about those external physical expressions of the sentiment or passion that litterateurs and artists paint. The bodily members change in position. Muscles are extended and contracted. Physiological changes occur simultaneously. The vascular system, the secretions, the nervous discharges, the quickened respiration with resultant increase of blood pressure, all show effects of the stimulus, and all these multiform phenomena will follow almost instantaneously and unconsciously.

An image or a memory may cause one to vomit, or to faint. Shock, even of a psychical kind, may so strain the valves or arteries that death may ensue. A bursting shell has so terrified people, who for years believed themselves paralyzed, that they have fled for safety, using their limbs once more. Intense emotion has accounted for startling phenomena of dermatography or skin-impressions, and it is stated in modern scientific books that warts can be caused by such simple means as putting a damp finger on the spot where the wart is wanted, while looking at the stars. Considerations of this kind cannot but serve to emphasize the widespread power that the mind has over the body and of the body over the mind. Emile Coué has done a service in illustrating these old-time truths. "My friend," he said to



a blacksmith, who for ten years had not been able to raise his hand above his shoulder, "you have been saying to yourself all these years, 'I cannot raise my hand, I cannot raise my hand,' and so you paralyzed your arm. Now! say with me, 'I can raise my hand, I can raise my hand'—now raise it!" And the blacksmith to his delight raised his hand high above his head. But are such cures permanent? Well in a sense, yes, and in a sense, no! The blacksmith, the very next day, might again have suggested himself into his paralysis by allowing himself to believe that he could not raise his hand. But on the contrary, he could retain his new-won power by keeping alive his belief that his arm was cured. Emile Coué has cleverly indicated the origin of many maladies. The stammerer tells himself that he is going to stammer, that he cannot speak without stammering—and he stammers! If he told himself that he was going to speak calmly, that he could and would speak calmly, and if by so telling himself he awakened the conviction that he was all right again, he would stammer no more! The Nancy School claim such cures and say that they are of daily occurrence in the Coué clinic.

Interesting sidelights are thrown on our ways of thinking and speaking by looking at life from the standpoint of suggestion. If it is true that we do suggest ourselves into pains and worries and difficulties, then we should never say and think like the tiro-cyclist in face of a gate-post, "I'm running into it. I can't avoid it." We should say and think, "I'm going safely by it. I'm past it already!" We shouldn't say: "I'm losing my memory," "I'm feeling depressed," "I'm sick of life," "I've a dreadful toothache," "I'm suffering from insomnia," or any such things. We should either with Coué *say and believe*, or with Eymieu "*act as if*," we were bright and gay, without pain, good sleepers, accurate of memory, etc. And why? Well, the sub-conscious may hold the key to the secret, we can do little more than proceed to make reasoned guesses as to what the **secret is**.

This powerful influence exercised by mind over body is what one who accepts the scholastic theory of man's nature should expect. Man is one, but his nature is composite—it is both spiritual and material. Man is not spirit nor matter, but matter united to a spirit which unifies, perfects,

vitalizes, completes and "informs" it. The soul of man is imperfect apart from his body; it is created to "inform" his body. Man is body and soul, united; a rational animal; a spiritualized substance. The body influences the mind; the mind cannot operate without the body. The soul influences the body; for the body is lifeless, inert, and falls into decay without the soul. Hence it is that any facts which illustrate the dual but unified nature of man, are in perfect harmony with Catholic philosophy, rendering it "increasingly more difficult for a biologist to be a pure materialist."

But the question still remains, how does the mind influence the body? How can an idea lead to a cure? Biologists and physiologists have as yet advanced no satisfactory theory; nevertheless, it seems to the present writer that the direction in which the answer is to be found can be indicated.

Readers will no doubt recall to mind those strange and wonderful phenomena of regeneration and recuperation of which the lower forms of animal life are capable. Protozoa and many forms of metazoa are capable of budding out almost any lost part, indeed, in some cases, if cut into bits, each bit will become a whole animal. A part of the bronchial apparatus of the Ascidian, *Clavellina*, if cut off, will become a complete *Clavellina*. A salamander's legs may be cut off six times in succession, and each time they will grow again. No doubt in higher forms of animal life this power of regeneration is much less marked. But nevertheless, even in man it is considerable, and processes of regeneration are constantly taking place under our eyes, and have been many times experienced since the first time we cut a finger or broke a bone.

This power of regeneration has to do with the blood system primarily, for the blood carries the hormones through the body. But the blood or vascular system is in turn controlled by the sympathetic nervous system, and here we come into close contact with the psychical.

Approaching the problem from another point of view, we have to consider briefly what are called "conditioned reflexes." If a plate of meat is shown to a dog, its mouth secretes saliva. This secretion is a reflex; the condition is the sight or smell of the meat. Now, if for some days, a

bell is rung when the plate of meat is presented to the dog, the bell also begins to condition the reflex. And after a time, the ringing of the bell, without the presentation of the meal, will be sufficient to cause the secretion of saliva. Here the sound of the bell is the condition. But we may go some steps further. We may introduce a new stimulus which will inhibit the secretion and we may add still another stimulus which will inhibit the inhibition of the secretion, so that the saliva flows. Further, as was done in a physiological laboratory in St. Petersburg, a painful stimulus, a strong electric current, may be made the condition for the secretion of the saliva, just as the sound of the bell was. In other words, pain, and fairly severe pain, may be utilized as a condition for a pleasure-reflex.

#### THE CONDITIONED REFLEX AND AUTO-SUGGESTION

But it may be asked, how does the "conditioned reflex" enter into the explanation of auto-suggestion? Of healing by an idea? Well, let us suppose that the regenerative or recuperative powers of the body act in some way as reflexes. What then can condition their activity? It may very well be something psychical. For we have seen in the case of the dog that various psychical phenomena can provoke or condition reflexes. Or again, the suggested idea may provoke one reflex, and it in turn may be the condition of the second or recuperative reflex. Or again, the recuperative powers may be set free to do healing work by the inhibition of some noxious reflexes. At least it may be confidently asserted that conditioned reflexes illustrate physiologically the methods of curing pain which Coué lays claim to. But, it must be confessed that the *modus operandi* whereby the thought and belief that "I am getting well and strong" heals an ulcer is still mysterious in the extreme, even though we call into play the sympathetic nervous system and its influence on blood supply.

There is no doubt that suggestion plays a far greater part in life than many people realize. On this fact the whole art of advertising rests. A mustard or a motor-car is so obtruded on the eyes, and ears, by advertising, and so glaringly and sensationally praised, that the thought of its special value is at length aroused. Patent medicines have effected thousands of cures, though often their only

merit lay in their innocence. New treatments for consumption, while in vogue and believed in, work a high percentage of cures, *no matter what the treatment is!* Confidence is aroused in the sufferer. Hope turns into belief. Belief, say the suggestionists, is the beginning of the cure. The Book of Proverbs has been aptly quoted: "A merry heart doth good like medicine; but a broken spirit drieth the bones."

While suggested courage thus does good, suggested discouragement does no end of harm. If a child is caught telling a lie or stealing, and is upbraided in a tactless way, it will be left under the impression that it is by nature deceitful and dishonest. This idea will perhaps be deepened by subsequent lapses, and the child's character may be ruined. If, on the other hand, the child, when caught in a theft, is shown how inconsistent this conduct is with its former honesty, if it is persuaded that its former good conduct was lovable and meritorious, true to the child's real self, then the child will have courage to live up to its former ideal. Often it happens that an impatient teacher will tell a child, "You will never be able to sing a note," or "You will never be able to do sums," or a parent will say, "You are a sulky, bad child, and nobody will like you." Such foolish reprimands may do great harm. The child will suggest itself into the state of not being able to sing, or do sums, and, in the last case, may become a confirmed misanthrope.

In moral matters suggestion plays a big part. Many of our virtues and vices are developed through the influence of suggestion. The idea is suggested to A that B does not like her. Then she begins to act in a strained way towards B, and finally ends by disliking B a quarrel perhaps ensues. If, on the other hand, the idea is suggested to A that B does like her all is quite the reverse. The devoted wife, who tells her husband again and again that he is a wretched, worthless fellow, and that he is a slave to drink, and that he prefers his glass of spirits to his family, is doing the very worst thing she could do. She is suggesting this unfortunate state of mind to her husband. He perhaps begins to feel himself a slave to drink, and so on. He comes to think: "I can't resist, once I have a drop or two taken." He thus makes a law for himself and resist-

ance becomes more and more improbable. *L'Idée incline à l'acte*, as Father Eymieu writes. The idea that he will yield inclines him to yield, and this idea is perhaps put into his head by his devoted but foolish wife.

When a child burns or hurts its little hand it runs crying to its mother. The mother "kisses the part to make it well." The child believes itself cured and stops crying. A little child, trained to practise auto-suggestion, was out one day for a walk with its mother. It cut its hand badly on barbed wire, but instead of crying, it ran up laughing to its mother, repeating a Coué formula—"It's not hurting, it's not hurting."

The Coué system then is quite in harmony with human experience, for we are all to some extent children, and very many of us suffer from "complaints" as unreal as the imaginary fears, tirednesses, and indispositions of children. Coué tells to treat ourselves as though we were children. A pain comes, then say again and again, "It's passing, it's passing." (A mother would say, "There's a good child! Your finger is all right now!") And if we are ill, we should say morning and evening, when in a drowsy state, several times: "In every way, day by day, I grow better and better."

There is not much to say by way of criticism of the theory and method of Emile Coué. In theory his position is perfectly sound. Various forms of faith-healing have been known for ages. Suggestion, or auto-suggestion, is not an ideal term to describe the phenomena, but it is quite good enough. His method is also sufficiently good to succeed in many cases. It is not, however, an ideal method. He attributes a great deal to the unconscious will, but one should not too readily find fault with this term. In the storehouse of the mind lie many potentialities, in what form we know not, perhaps as images, which become dynamic even before we are conscious of them. Appeal to the "unconscious" or the "*unconscious will*" is no blind appeal, and it is unquestionable that the "mind" working unconsciously plays its part in the phenomena of suggestion.

Still, there is little really new in Emile Coué's theory and method. He has done good work in again bringing to light the deep significance of suggestion. And he has

focussed his theory in a practical way. There is nothing in his theory and method, when rightly understood, which should hinder Catholics from belief in or use of his help. And everyone should derive advantage from studying this new edition of old wisdom.

Some Catholics may be alarmed at the thought that the wonder-works of Coué will rob contemporary miracles, say, the miracles of Lourdes, of their evidential value, and give grounds to enemies of the supernatural to cast doubt on all miracles. "Here," they will say, "at Coué's word the lame walk, the blind see, and so forth! What then of the miracles of the Gospel? If by suggestion these wonders can be wrought, why invoke Divine power?"

The answer to such "difficulties" is not hard to find. What can be done naturally, both as to *the fact* and *the manner* in which the fact is brought about, is a natural work and not a miracle. No Catholic claims such works or wonders as "miracles." Miracles are works wrought against or above the power of nature—either as to the *fact* or *the manner* in which the fact is brought about, or as to both. And at Lourdes, to say nothing of the Gospel miracles, wonders have been wrought which seem most certainly to be beyond the power of nature in either or both of these respects. When a medical bureau, of the type of the Lourdes medical bureau, is established at Nancy, and when it can bring forward cases parallel in every respect to the medically authenticated Lourdes miracles, it will be time enough to cast doubt on the latter. Suffice it for the moment to say, firstly, that at Lourdes the types of "wonder-works" achieved by the New Nancy School are not put forward as authenticated miracles, but as mere "suggestion" cures, and, secondly, even the authenticated miracles of Lourdes are in no sense objects of Divine faith. In regard to all of them Catholics are free to believe in them or reject them, according to their estimate of the evidence in support of them.

As to whether the new method has succeeded in curing organic as distinct from functional ailments the evidence seems somewhat uncertain, although the claim for such cures is made by Baudouin and others. The present writer does not see any great difficulty in admitting the possibility of organic cures by auto-suggestion. When a

lesion of an organ occurs, or say a bone is broken, there is in addition to the organic trouble a functional disturbance as well. Functional trouble and organic trouble go hand in hand. Now it is admitted that auto-suggestion can cure or help to cure functional disorder. And it is admitted that such functional cure can at least hasten the repairing of the injured organism. It may be that functional healing, in some cases, leads to organic healing and the knitting of a bone, for instance, might be greatly aided by the disappearance of tumors around the lesion. Coué claims to have cured tumors of all kinds. Nevertheless, it is in the field of nervous disorders that auto-suggestion can do most good. Professor Dubois wrote many years ago: "As soon as a man believes himself sick, he is sick. It is not that he merely thinks himself sick. He becomes really and physically sick." And again: "The neurasthenic is on the road to a cure as soon as he has the conviction that he is going to get well. He is cured the day he believes himself to be cured." Once more, these are old ideas, but for that they are nonetheless interesting.

---

### "The National School"

**I**N America there is no such thing as a national school, or "the national school," or a national system of schools. The Constitution, the expression of the will of the people, by which all institutions of the people as a whole, are called into existence, knows nothing of any of these institutions. Nothing such is mentioned in that document. Neither has such an institution been instituted by Federal statute, nor did the Americans who signed the Declaration of Independence or fought in the Revolution, or sat in Philadelphia to draft the Constitution, ever contemplate it. Moreover, when, in 1790, Washington, in his address to Congress, cautiously and doubtfully suggested the establishment in Washington of just one school wherein Americans might be taught "to know and value their rights and to discern and provide against invasion of them," his suggestion came to naught by deliberate act of the Senate, Father of the Country, though he was.



And, in December, 1797, his recommendation that a national university be founded for the education of Americans in the science of government met the same fate. So, too, was it with all similar suggestions. Jefferson, in 1806, and Monroe, in 1817, vaguely suggested some form of national subsidy for seminaries, but after exploiting Madison's test to decide the constitutionality of the recommendation, Jefferson wrote that "Congress do not have the right" and he added that the Federal Government could acquire such a right only by an amendment to the Constitution. Monroe's idea also vanished into thin air. Again, in 1825, John Quincy Adams spoke about the advisability of a national university in his message to Congress, but no action was taken. Lastly, in 1838, Jackson vetoed a bill appropriating public lands for public education within the States.

#### THE "FATHERS" AND THE NATIONAL SCHOOL

This is what the Fathers thought of just one national school and public subsidies, to say nothing of "the national school," or a national system of public schools or whatever one may call it. Yet these men were Americans, very good Americans, too. They won our independence, they fixed our traditions, they guided the Republic through the stormy days of its infancy.

But perhaps the public school as it now exists is "the national school" or the "historic, established, fundamental institution" for the "making" of Americans, as a writer in *Harper's* for October, 1922, fatuously proclaims. Not at all. On the contrary, all that has just been said, and more, applies to the public school of today. The Constitution knows nothing of it; Federal statutes know nothing of it; the Fathers of the Republic knew nothing of it. The "historic" American school was the private school, from which came forth all the great heroes of our early history, men nurtured in religion and morality and set so strong in hope, idealism and courage that they sacrificed everything for their country.

Washington, himself, would never have approved the present public school which has officially barred its door against God and His doctrine, for he believed that democratic government could not be preserved without morality

and realized that there can be no morality without religion. He warned his countrymen against such a delusion, and, therefore, it cannot be supposed that he would have approved or would approve now of schools that officially and definitely sever religion from education.

The plain fact of the matter is that the present public school is exotic and not a "historic American institution." In a very real and true sense it is not an American institution at all, but an importation, proximately from revolutionary France, remotely from Julian, nurtured by Mann in the soil of New England.

Yet all this and more is overlooked in the remarkable attack on Catholic schools in the current *Harper's* set under the caption of "The National School." The article is remarkable for historical inaccuracy and pagan philosophy and will but add fuel to growing bitterness. If such topics must be discussed, is it not possible for magazines to employ writers who know something about such elementary topics as the Constitution of the United States, the history of American education and ethics? In the present instance had this fundamental precaution been observed, *Harper's* would have been spared the humiliation of spreading on its pages such rank paganism as "My child is first a national child; he belongs to the nation, even before he belongs to himself." This is Communism at its best or at its worst. In it the Soviet is glorified once again, but not *Harper's*.

## What a Christian Brother Is

*The San Francisco "Monitor"*

BROTHER LEO

THE editor of the California Council publication has honored me with an invitation to contribute to his pages. And most of all he has honored me by letting me choose my own subject. A cobbler should stick to his last, however, and an educator, if he writes at all, should write on education. And so I venture to say a word or two on a subject that is eminently educational, partly because it pertains to the members of a religious Congregation founded exclusively for educational work, and partly because I happen to know that ever so many good Catholics fail signally to understand the sort of life we Brothers lead and the sort of men we Brothers are and the sort of ideals we Brothers cherish.

May I begin by remarking, quietly, but emphatically, that a Christian Brother is not a spoiled priest? Really, and despite an amusingly general impression to the contrary, we are not men who have tried to become priests and failed. We are not priests, we do not want to be priests, because we are convinced that ours is not the priestly vocation. We are simply something different. And there are no priests in our institute—all Christian Brothers are Brothers, neither more nor less.

Our life has three sides to it. First of all, we are religious, "monks," if you will, in the very generic and slightly inaccurate use of that word, men bound by vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and living in community under an approved rule of life. We get up quite early and pray and meditate and hear Mass; and from time to time during the day the bell calls us to the chapel again. That is the religious side of our life.

Next, we are students, life-long students. Some of us hold university degrees, some of us have studied in Europe, some of us are recognized authorities in certain fields of scholarship. But we all are students. There comes normally a time in our life when we have no more examinations to prepare for and no more degrees to secure; but there never comes a time when the obligation

of study ceases for us—save that momentous time when all earthly obligations cease. While we live, we live much in libraries and laboratories, for it is needful that we know well and intimately the tools of our trade. That is the scholarly side of our life.

And, finally, we are teachers. A public school official once asked a Christian Brother, "What sort of teaching do you men undertake?" And the Brother answered, "We teach anything of the male sex." And we do. The Brothers teach in parochial schools and they teach in universities; they teach in orphanages and they teach in colleges; they teach in normal schools and technical schools and high schools. And they teach until old age dims their eyes and stills their voices. Or else—and this is the usual way—they die happily in harness. That is the educational side of our life.

The Christian Brothers have been in San Francisco since 1868, when the late Archbishop Alemany called them to take charge of old St. Mary's College, then on the Mission Road. Their first local Superior was Brother Justin, and he was a not inconspicuous figure in the Catholic life of the city. Some years later, they opened Sacred Heart College, a huge frame building that stood at Eddy and Larkin streets until the flames licked it away in the disaster of 1906. Sacred Heart College is now at Ellis and Franklin streets and serves as a boys' high school for San Francisco. Out in the Mission, in St. Peter's School, the Brothers have been teaching for more than thirty years.

The Christian Brothers, more accurately called the Brothers of the Christian Schools, were founded in France in the time of Louis XIV. The man who established them is now a canonized saint whose feast is observed on May 15—St. John Baptist de la Salle. He was an educational genius who in several important respects was appreciably ahead of his time. Not even the French Revolution could destroy the Institute of the Brothers in France, for after that event they spread amazingly. And not even the pagan laws against religious teaching could destroy the Brothers' influence. During the Great War, thousands of Brothers, exiled to foreign lands, went back to France to fight for *la patrie*; and more Christian

Brothers died and men of other religious Orders or Congregations.

Who become Brothers? Obviously, those whom God calls to our state of life. And, not less obviously, God calls those who are generous and anxious to help others, who especially feel a liking for the religious life and for scholarly pursuits, who have the brains and the temperament to adopt a program of plain living and high thinking.

We need more such men. Right here on the Pacific Coast, our work is impeded by lack of numbers. Requests are made by Bishops to open new schools, especially high schools, and we cannot cooperate with the plans of the Hierarchy, simply because there are not enough of us to go round. Yes, we need more men.

Let me be impertinent, and say to you who read this article: Does this mean you? Are you young and unattached, decent enough to wish to become a religious, brainy enough to wish to become a scholar, generous enough to wish to learn how to enlighten young minds and mold growing characters? Does this particular work of the Church of God appeal to you? It is a big work, an important work, a work bursting with possibilities. Will you take a hand in it?

What return does the Christian Brother receive? In a temporal way, nothing to speak of. His Community is a good mother to him and looks after his health and his reasonable creature comforts, but she doesn't usually pamper him. Dignities and honors are not normally his, either, and for the most part he lives apart from the world and of the world unknown. But he is very happy—or ought to be. He has the highest pleasures—those of the mind and those of the soul—in copious abundance, and he has the exquisite joy, not only of engaging in congenial work, but of knowing that his work means something in the world of men and affairs, and something even more in the eyes of God.

All in all, it is a happy life, and some of us know it, and we are glad we are where we are. And a good many men in this world today, if they only knew what we know, would plunge through fire and water to follow our vocation.